



# City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

## SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

JANUARY 12, 2006

### Approved Meeting Minutes

#### **Commissioners in Attendance**

Jerry Finrow – Vice-Chair, George Blomberg, Mahlon Clements, Tom Eanes, Martin Kaplan, Valerie Kinast, Carl See, Mimi Sheridan, Tony To

#### **Commissioners Absent**

Steve Sheehy – Chair, Hilda Blanco, Chris Fiori, Lyn Krizanich, Joe Quintana

#### **Commission Staff**

Barbara Wilson – Director, Scott Dvorak – Planning Analyst, Robin Magonegil – Administrative Assistant

#### **Guests**

Adrienne Quinn - Director of Office of Housing, John Rahaim - Director of City Planning/DPD, Susan Sanchez – Director of Policy & Planning/SDOT, Margaret Kitchell, Feet First

*Please Note: Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript but instead represent key points and the basis of the discussion.*

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 3:07 pm by Vice-Chair Jerry Finrow.

#### **COMMISSION BUSINESS**

##### **Chair & Staff Report**

##### **▪ Happy New Year & 2005 Accomplishments**

Vice Chair Finrow reported that the Planning Commission is looking forward to a full and busy work plan in 2006. He also took a moment to reflect on the Commission's accomplishments in 2005. He noted some of the Commission highlights such as convening the industrial lands roundtable discussion facilitated and hosted by the Commission, review of the Northbay DEIS, review of the Monorail contract and white papers addressing several specific aspects of that project, review of the 2005 Comp Plan amendments, facilitation of focus groups and public meeting as part of the multi-family code rewrite project, production of a neighborhood plan comparison for the Center City neighborhoods, and much more.

##### **▪ December 8, 2005 Minutes**

Vice Chair Finrow reported that the December 8, 2005 minutes are not available for approval but will be at the next meeting. He noted that Commissioners will receive them for review before the next meeting.

### ▪ **New Member Recruitment**

Chair Finrow noted that the rating team was finish up the review of the second cut resumes and winnow the list down to 8-10 finalists to interview. He then asked for volunteers to assist with the interview process in late January early February. Commissioners Mahlon Clements, Martin Kaplan and George Blomberg volunteered to participate in the interviews. He noted that the Director and a representative from the mayor's office will also participate in the interviews.

### ▪ **Ethics Update**

Vice-Chair Finrow updated Commissioners on the status of the ethics issue. He reported that legislation is moving forward. He also reported that there is a committee of Commissioners meeting to develop an ethics management plan for the Commission. He noted that the City's Ethics Commission has been asked to extend the moratorium for the Planning Commission beyond the February 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, so that we can continue to conduct our business until the issue is fully resolved.

Executive Director Wilson indicated that Mayor's office is still finalizing legislation. She noted that the Seattle Center Advisory Commission has sent a letter to the Council and the Mayor voicing concern with the ethics rules changes, many of those concerns are similar to the Planning Commission. She reported that she plans to meet with them and that it is beginning to look as though we may not be the only voice at the table when this legislation gets to the City Council. Ms. Wilson noted that the City Council is currently occupied with filling a vacated City Council seat and electing a Council President and that they won't likely look at this legislation until those items are completed.

Vice-Chair Finrow pointed out that Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck has offered a counter to the Mayor's downtown zoning proposal. Among the differences include a higher fee for affordable housing, lower heights of buildings in some areas, and parking location restrictions (Steinbrueck's proposal looked at requiring all parking to be underground or allowing a maximum of two levels of above ground). Steinbrueck is also interested in working with the school district to bring a school downtown as well as advocating more public open space in Belltown (including a specific proposal to create a town commons in Belltown).

### ▪ **Steinbrueck Downtown Zoning Proposal**

Vice-Chair Finrow reported that Councilmember Steinbrueck had released an alternate proposal on downtown zoning. He reminded Commissioners that Planning Commission Analyst Scott Dvorak has sent the details of the proposal to Commissioners to review. He questioned how the Planning Commission should weigh in on Steinbrueck's proposal. He stated that feels that the Commission should weigh in but noted that we haven't been specifically asked to do so yet.

Commissioner Sheridan added that she has recently mentioned to Neil Powers, Legislative Aide to Councilmember Steinbrueck's office that the Commission has generally been very supportive of the their ideas in regard to downtown. Vice-Chair Finrow reminded the Commission that when we made the presentation to the UDP Committee he indicated that we would be happy to work on downtown livability issues further as Councilmember Steinbrueck had requested. Vice Chair Finrow noted that he feels that the Commission has an obligation to weigh in on Steinbrueck's proposal and that it is central to the Planning Commission mandate. He pointed out that there might be some interesting middle ground between the two views of the Councilmember and the Mayor and that the SPC should read and review both proposals and comment on them. After further discussion it was concluded that the Commission would discuss with Councilmember Steinbrueck and Council Central Staff the possibility of a briefing in the very near future.

## **Committee Reports**

### **▪ Housing, Neighborhood and Urban Centers**

Commissioner Eanes reported on the Housing, Neighborhood and Urban Centers (HNUC) meeting. He reported that the Committee received a briefing from Jory Phillips of DPD on pending Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs) legislation for SE Seattle. He noted that Mr. Phillips thought that Council may act on the legislation by March and that there were no substantive changes to the legislation since the Commission last saw a draft of it. Commissioner Eanes added that the committee then discussed the development of a task force to create a plan book or guide book service once the legislation has been passed. He noted that the SPC would convene a task force that he would be the lead on. He also noted Commissioner To will participate as well. Other Commissioners are welcome to join and the group will possibly also include members of other organizations as well including Office of Housing, AIA, and a resident of Southeast Seattle. Ms. Wilson added that Diane Sugimura, Director of DPD, is very interested in supporting a task force and stated that the Office of Housing should be involved. Commissioner Kaplan volunteered to be a part of the task force.

Commissioner Eanes continued that the Committee had a presentation by DPD staff on the Livable South Downtown project. He reported that the presentation outlined the preliminary proposals – many of which seemed somewhat developer driven. He noted that he has heard from different community groups in the International District that they are feeling closed out of this process. Vice-Chair Finrow asked if this project is leading to some legislation. Mr. Dvorak responded that a report will come out at the end of the month and then legislation will be developed over the summer which should go to City Council to be considered in the beginning of 2007. Commissioner Kaplan asked if this proposal will change any zoning. Mr. Dvorak responded that there may be proposals to change zoning but that any major changes would be submitted for Comp Plan review in 2007. Vice-Chair Finrow asked if there were plans for public hearings and reviews. Ms. Wilson noted that the first public open house was back in October or November. Commissioner Sheridan added that there will be another one, as well as an EIS process. Vice-Chair Finrow asked who the project manager was for this project. Mr. Dvorak responded that Susan McLain and Gordon Clowers are co-managing it. Vice-Chair Finrow requested that they be scheduled to come and give a presentation to the full Commission sometime in February. Ms. Wilson noted that the last time that Susan McLain reported to the Commission, the main issues discussed were how the project converges with our work on Center City, industrial lands and the Comp Plan. She suggested that these issues would be good ones for the Planning Commission to track as the project continues to move forward.

### **▪ Land Use and Transportation**

Commissioner Blomberg reported on the Land Use and Transportation (LUT) committee meeting. LUT hasn't meet since October of last year. He reported that at that meeting they heard from SDOT concerning the Community Transportation Improvement Project in Northgate. Commissioner Blomberg noted that safety and pedestrian improvements were highlighted.

Commissioner Blomberg continued that Sound Transit also provided the committee with a construction update on the Light Rail project as well as information on the ST2 process. Commissioner Blomberg felt that Sound Transit was doing a good job addressing community impacts and wondered whether anyone had information to the contrary. Commissioner To indicated that there were many things that could be improved, businesses were suffering in some areas, but doing alright in others. In many cases it is the small, family-owned businesses that are suffering the most.

Commissioner Blomberg then discussed the presentation on ST2. He indicated that it doesn't seem clear to him how the Commission weighs in on something like this – or even how the City as a whole does. Vice-Chair Finrow noted that he thinks it would be a good idea for us to look at in the committee level and then recommend a course of action to the full Commission.

Commissioner Blomberg noted that the important issue coming up at the next meeting is the Viaduct. Commissioner Clements brought up that the City has allocated money to study transportation in the former monorail Green Line corridor. He feels that this is a topic that LUT should include in their comments to Sound Transit.

## **COMMISSION DISCUSSION**

Vice-Chair Finrow noted there are two items that we need to address: the SE Seattle DADU legislation and the Waterfront Concept Plan.

### **■ Legislation regarding Detached ADU's in SE Seattle**

Ms. Wilson mentioned that the Commission is on record for supporting DADU's. She suggested that the Commission could basically reiterate what we have already said. She added that the Commission may want to revisit how to express its support of the legislation being applied city-wide. Commissioner To asked how the legislation addressed the issue of it being a "pilot". Commissioner Eanes responded that it is a permanent change for SE Seattle and it can only be seen as a "pilot" in respect to its application to the rest of the city.

Vice-Chair Finrow suggested a procedural change on how we submit letters to City Council. As we prepare letters to send to Council, we should inform the Urban Design and Planning (UDP) committee that we are doing so and ask if there are any particular points they would like us to address. That way, UDP will know that we are working on the issue and they will be given an opportunity to specifically ask for information or opinions from us that they would find valuable as they consider their legislation.

Commissioner Eanes agreed to draft a proposed letter for review of the full commission at the January 26 meeting.

### **■ Waterfront Concept Plan**

The discussion of the Waterfront Concept Plan was moved to a latter time to accommodate the scheduled briefing by Adrienne Quinn from the Office of Housing.

## **Briefing: Affordable Housing Study**

### **Adrienne Quinn, Director - Office of Housing**

Vice Chair Finrow welcomed Adrienne Quinn and invited her to give her briefing to the Commission. Ms. Quinn reported that the Office of Housing has created a housing needs assessment by analyzing U.S. Census Bureau data in addition to local residential market information in an attempt to identify where the gaps are in Seattle's housing market.

She stated that there are significant differences between affordability in the rental market versus the homeownership market. She noted that in the rental market, lower wage workers (i.e., families earning under \$40,000 per year) have difficulty finding an apartment that they can rent. For homeownership,

she stated, any household earning less than median income, which by definition is half of Seattle's households, cannot currently afford to buy a house in the City.

Ms. Quinn noted that housing is considered "affordable" if a household can afford housing as well as their other basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation costs, daycare, etc. As a rule of thumb, an apartment or house is affordable for a household if the monthly housing costs (rent or mortgage/taxes/insurance/condo dues, plus basic utilities) do not exceed 30% of the household's monthly income.

Concerning "workforce housing," Ms. Quinn noted that the term generally refers to housing for workers who are priced out of the market. She stated that in Seattle, workers are priced out of the rental market if they earn less than about \$27,000 a year and that for home ownership; most workers are priced out of the market if they earn less than \$40,000 a year. She reported that in order to afford the average rent for a one bedroom apartment in Seattle, a worker must earn at least \$16 an hour and that it is necessary to earn \$18 an hour to afford an average priced two bedroom apartment.

Vice-Chair Finrow noted that the report's data does not address households with two wage-earners and that is something that should be included or, at least, noted. Ms. Quinn agreed. She added that Seattle does have a lot of singles and people who are living together out of financial necessity. Vice-Chair Finrow suggested that a section be added that discusses that subject and then include the statistics of single people versus families. Ms. Quinn mentioned that the challenge for them is to keep this document from getting too long and to remain concise and understandable.

Commissioner Sheridan suggested that the report also include information explaining the 30% rule noting that it is something that people in the field understand, but the average person doesn't necessarily.

Ms. Quinn continued that in Seattle the largest gap in the rental market is for people who earn less than \$16,000-\$23,350 a year (depending on family size.) She reported that approximately 18,000 Seattle households are paying more than one-third of their income, and in some cases 50-75% of their incomes, on rent. She pointed out that this figure does not include homeless people. Adding together the number of people who cannot afford their rent and therefore forego other necessities in order to pay their rent along with the number of people who are homeless on the streets in Seattle (not those who are in shelters or transitional housing), Seattle needs at least 20,000 more low rent units to meet the needs of that population. She pointed out that even households that earn up to \$38,950 have a difficult time finding units they can afford. One reason is that households with higher incomes often chose to rent apartments that are less expensive than what they can actually afford, thereby reducing the number of available units in the market. The higher a household's income, the more choices that household has of available rental units. She noted that lower income workers get squeezed out of the market because they have fewer choices if people of all income levels are competing for the cheapest rental units.

Moving on to homeownership, Ms. Quinn noted that the median price for a home in Seattle is \$383,000 as of Fall 2005. She reported that home prices have increased 30% since 2002, far outpacing increases in income and in order to be able to buy a home in Seattle, a household must earn more than \$47,521 a year. She reported that is higher than the current median income for a single person household. In many Seattle neighborhoods, home prices also exceed median income

for a family of four, which is \$72,500. This means that more than half of the households in Seattle cannot afford to buy a home in the City.

Ms Quinn continued that this situation creates a challenge for the Office of Housing because it is restricted in how it may use its assistance funds to people who are at 80% of median income and below. Therefore, people between 80% and 100% of median income cannot afford to buy a home in the City, but are also not eligible for City assistance or programs. Commissioner Sheridan asked if this information is only first time home buyers. Ms. Quinn noted that this data is basically for home buyers in general regardless of whether this is the first time or not.

Vice-Chair Finrow suggested that another topic that might be added to the report would be the decline of home ownership in Seattle. Ms. Quinn responded that they have had interesting discussions regarding this and whether or not this is a bad thing. She noted that they are trying to figure out how to look at it – homeownership is one indicator of a City’s affordability, but a vibrant rental market is also an indicator of economic vibrancy. She said the goal is to have housing choices for all people and home affordability. Vice-Chair Finrow noted that this is a consideration that is now part of the livability discussion downtown.

Ms Quinn reported that 51% of all white households own homes whereas only 25% of Latinos do. She noted that there is a lot of work to do in terms of racial equity so that all groups have opportunities to become home owners.

Ms. Quinn concluded her briefing by noting the next steps identified in the report. There are three major gaps that have been identified: homelessness, rental units for those not eligible for subsidized housing but not enough to afford a unit in the marketplace, and homeownership for those earning less than median income. Vice Chair Finrow wondered what sort of things the Planning Commission could do to assist the Office of Housing in their efforts. Ms. Quinn indicated that as they draft their action agenda they will bring it to the Planning Commission for our input and assistance – probably sometime in February. Vice Chair Finrow added that the Planning Commission is developing a task force to create a DADU technical guide and would like to have someone from the Office of Housing on that taskforce. Ms. Quinn agreed. Vice-Chair Finrow thanked Ms. Quinn for her time.

## **Planning Director Report**

**John Rahaim, DPD City Planning**

**Susan Sanchez, SDOT Policies and Planning**

Before giving his update, John Rahaim took a moment to thank the Commission for the work they are doing on dealing with the ethics issue that commissions are currently facing and reiterated City Planning’s support for the value of having a Planning Commission with the current membership.

Mr. Rahaim noted that he would provide information on the waterfront planning process and on a couple upcoming work program items. He reported that on the waterfront City Planning is trying to put closure to the Waterfront Concept Plan. He mentioned that there is an allocation in the budget this year to produce a public realm plan but City Council has put a proviso on that budget that does not allow them to spend that money until they approve the Waterfront Concept Plan. He stated that this is putting the planning process into a timing bind as the Viaduct project is making decisions quickly. He

explained that the primary goal of the public realm plan would be to make some decisions about the character and conceptual design of the streets as well as the open surface along the waterfront so that the Viaduct project can accommodate that. He noted that City Planning is doing everything it can, short of signing a contract, to be ready to move quickly on the public realm plan and they will be briefing City Council on February 13. He added that Council will most likely not approve the concept plan until mid March or early April.

Commissioner Sheridan asked if he thought the Council's consideration of this would be held up by the discussion on whether the project would be a tunnel or not. Mr. Rahaim responded that what City Planning has said when that question comes up is that if there is a new overhead structure then the work that they have been doing doesn't make a whole lot of sense - but if there is a tunnel or no replacement of an elevated structure, then most of the work in the Waterfront Concept Plan remains valid. He stated that he would be very surprised if we ended up with a new overhead highway.

Commissioner Eanes mentioned that he attended a briefing at a Belltown community meeting at which a representative from Washington State Department of Transportation stated that money for the 'core project' was either committed or earmarked as anticipated funds. He indicated that the briefing made it sound as though there isn't really a question that there would be anything but a tunnel.

Vice-Chair Finrow asked how much money is being allocated to their urban design work from the Council that is being held up. Mr. Rahaim replied that it is a quarter of a million dollars. Commissioner Eanes expressed that it is crucial that City Planning work goes forward. He noted that what was presented at the Belltown meeting was that they now are proposing a double stacked tunnel and that it goes under Elliot and Western. He reported that the cost estimate doesn't appear to include a lid over Elliott and Western, but City Planning ought to at least plan for a lid which would start with the work that Mr. Rahaim is talking about. He stated that if it is not included, then it will get engineered out and the forward-thinking work will not get done.

Vice-Chair Finrow asked to whom the Planning Commission would send any letter we might develop on this topic. Mr. Rahaim said that he did not want to over-emphasize the action that Council took in requiring their approval of the Concept Plan before releasing money for a public realm plan, but it is causing some concern in terms of timing. He noted that Council has approved those monies as part of the budget, so the money is indeed there. City Planning is meeting with Councilmember Steinbrueck concerning this soon. Vice-Chair Finrow asked if the Planning Commission should write a letter to Councilmember Steinbrueck. Mr. Rahaim answered that he felt that we should wait on this for the time being.

Mr. Rahaim noted that City Planning is getting closer to finalizing their work plan for 2006. He mentioned that the Center City work that Gary Johnson is primarily responsible for will focus on family-friendly initiatives which includes a whole package of things which range from talking to the school board about the possibility of downtown schools to looking at the way we do open space downtown and how more kid-friendly open spaces could be developed as well as talking to developers about what it would take to motivate them to build larger units with three or four bedrooms. These issues will be Mr. Johnson's highest priorities when it comes to the Center City work. He noted that how the Commission gets involved in that is not clear yet and that he would like to further discuss with us our role for 2006.

Mr. Rahaim reported that another possible project this year could be a shoreline mitigation plan for the Duwamish, similar to one completed for the Ship Canal. He noted that whether this happens or not

will depend on grant money coming from the King County Conservation District. Commissioner Sheridan asked if Mr. Rahaim could describe the Ship Canal project a bit more. He responded that the current effort extends from around the perimeter of Lake Union all the way along the Ship Canal to Salmon Bay and basically created a single location for mitigation measures to be carried out, rather than requiring each project along the Canal to do on-site mitigation. He replied that this way, the City can realize a more affective and comprehensive effort to restore habitat in a particular area rather than get piecemeal, relatively ineffectual mitigation. He noted that Jim Holmes has been heading this up for City Planning and has gotten a pretty strong consensus about the approach.

Mr. Rahaim mentioned the Dravus proposal and noted that it is on the City Planning work plan this year. He reported that the intent is to look at that commercially zoned area at 15<sup>th</sup> and Dravus and see if they should change that zone and how much up-zoning could be accommodated, if any. Commissioner Sheridan questioned if that discussion will include transportation. Mr. Rahaim replied that their scope probably won't include that. Susan Sanchez responded that SDOT is not looking at Dravus but is looking at connecting Ballard with Downtown and West Seattle with Downtown.

Mr. Rahaim then mentioned that one project that City Planning and SDOT are working on together is a larger transportation mitigation program similar to what Mike Podowski has been working on in the South Lake Union neighborhood. He reported that the City is now going to look more broadly at Downtown and at updating the University District study done several years ago. Susan Sanchez noted that through the SEPA process the City gets contributions for mitigation measures. She stated that creating a comprehensive area-wide plan allows them to spend those mitigation funds in a more strategic way. Ms. Sanchez also mentioned that the Northgate transportation plan is underway and will be wrapped up this year as will the transportation plan study for Southeast Seattle.

Ms. Sanchez also reported that SDOT will be studying to the transportation corridors connecting West Seattle to downtown as well as Ballard to Downtown now that the monorail project is no longer underway. Vice-Chair Finrow noted that there was a lot of work done on station area planning in DPD related to the monorail and, while the monorail is no longer, a lot of that work was pretty interesting and possibly still relevant. He suggested that SDOT try to use some of the work as the basis for their work. Ms. Sanchez noted that she was familiar with that work and she recognized the commitment the community made during that process and wanted to capture what was accomplished. Commissioner Sheridan noted that the development in Ballard is pretty far from where the monorail was going to be. Ms. Sanchez replied that this point had come up and they do not have to follow that routing that the monorail was going to do but more a look at what the transit market is that they are trying to serve.

Ms. Wilson mentioned that SDOT had done a freight mobility study and the Planning Commission has been involved with both the South Downtown project and industrial land issues. She asked if the freight mobility study was relevant to either one of those issues and whether it was something that we should take a look at or have someone from SDOT come and speak to the Commission about. Ms. Sanchez replied that it definitely is. She noted that they update the Freight Mobility Action Strategy annually. She added that there are key streets and corridors that have been identified on which we know we need to be able to accommodate bigger vehicles. She noted that there are not that many east-west routes in the south part of Downtown. Vice-Chair Finrow thanked Ms. Sanchez for her time and looked forward to hearing more about the SDOT 2006 work plan and where the Planning Commission can best play a role.



## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Vice Chair Finrow invited Public Comment. Margaret Kitchell from Feet First introduced herself. She stated that Feet First is working on a project called “Promoting Healthy Built Environments” and working with the Public Health department of King County. She stated that they are looking at a health impact assessment process with a grant from the Center for Disease Control and is part of the Healthier Steps grant in South Seattle and South King County. She reported that they are particularly looking at environments that will promote physical activity. She asked whether the C1 zone is coming up for review. Mr. Rahaim answered that that is actually part of what is in front of City Council right now in terms of some changes to the neighborhood commercial zones. He reported that the C1 and C2 districts do not change a lot in that proposal since they are typically in places that are already auto-oriented. He noted that they have included some provisions in the C zones that try to encourage better pedestrian connections within the zones from the rights-of-way to commercial facilities. He further reported that they have also proposed a maximum surface parking area which could help foster a more pedestrian-friendly environment. He added that rezoning would have to happen on a case by case basis. Commissioner Eanes added that criteria for rezoning has been changed to reflect the intended objective of the zone as opposed to what the zone has been. There was no other public comment.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Vice-Chair Finrow adjourned the meeting at 5:42 pm.